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U.S. WORK PERMITS FOR H-4 VISA TO BE AUTO-RENEWED

Joe Biden's administration settles class-action lawsuit to allow automatic extension of permits for up to six months

BIG RELIEF FOR INDIAN-ORIGIN EMPLOYEES

Thousands of Indian women have been caught in a months-long backlog for receiving work permits under the programme that allows spouses of H-1B holders to be employed in the US. Many women lost their ability to work or even their jobs due to processing delays caused by Covid-19 as well as a Trump-era policy requiring fresh fingerprints in renewal applications

I-94 DOCUMENT SHOULD REMAIN VALID

- The latest policy change is the result of a lawsuit by The American Immigration Lawyers Association on behalf of immigrant spouses
- Reports say applicants will have to get H-4 visas stamped for the auto-extension, which can happen until the I-94 expires or 180 days from the expiration of the prior permit, whichever is sooner

90,000

H-4 HOLDERS, MOST OF THEM FROM INDIA, HAVE GOTTEN WORK PERMITS

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • WARANGAL • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

Factory output slows to 3.1%, retail inflation up by 4.48%

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ New Delhi

INDIA'S industrial production growth slowed down to 3% in September, a seven-month low, on account of chip shortage, coal mining disruption, and normalisation of base effect, as per data from the National Statistical Office on Friday.

Manufacturing sector's output surged 2.7% in September, mining output grew 8.6% and power generation 0.9%. India's industrial production, measured by the Index of Industrial Production (IIP), had grown by 1% in September 2020. Despite the festive season, consumer durables output was 2% lower than a year ago, while consumer non-durables was down 0.5%.

Experts found it a bit disappointing. "No doubt festival demand is finding reflection in the year-on-year growth but the consumption demand after Covid 1.0 & 2.0 still has not reached to the level that output could reach or surpass the pre-Covid period," said Sunil Kumar Sinha, principal economist, India Ratings.

Aditi Nayar, chief economist, ICRA, said supply side issues in the auto sector are still a dampener. "We expect the high base to keep the IIP growth lacklustre at under 2.5%" in October.

Meanwhile retail inflation, measured by Consumer Price Index, rose marginally in October to 4.48% due to an uptick in food and fuel prices.

EXPRESS READ

Suicide bomber among three militants killed in J&K

Srinagar: Three militants, including a 'fidayeen' (suicide bomber), have been gunned down in two separate encounters in Jammu and Kashmir. A 'Mujahideen Gazwatul Hind' militant, who was assigned to carry out a suicide attack in Srinagar, was killed, while a Hizbul Mujahideen (HM) district commander was among the two ultras slain in an encounter in Kulgam, police said. The 'fidayeen' militant was a relative of one of the accused in the February 2019 Pulwama suicide attack.

Women win fight as SC warns Army of contempt

Court had told Centre to issue permanent commission to 39 officers within 7 days, but Army kept dragging feet

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ New Delhi

HOURS after the Supreme Court threatened to haul up the Army for contempt, the latter on Friday assured will offer Permanent Commission (PC) to all eligible women officers soon. The court had to throw its weight around saying the Army may be supreme in its authority but the SC is equally supreme in its jurisdiction, before the Army finally yielded.

A bench headed by Justice D Y Chandrachud was in the forenoon hearing a contempt petition filed by 11 officers who were denied PC despite meeting all parameters laid down by the court in the Lt Col Nishita case. Last month, the court had told the Centre to issue PC to 39 Women Short Service Commission (SSC) Officers within seven working days, but the Army kept dragging its feet.

Benchmark for granting PC

In the Lt Col Nishita case, the SC said all women officers who score 60% in their assessment are eligible for PC if they meet the Army's medical criteria and get disciplinary and vigilance clearance

"We are holding the Army guilty of contempt. We are putting you on guard and we are recording a finding on this. The Army may be supreme in its authority but this constitutional court is also supreme in its jurisdiction. We gave you a very long rope," Justice Chandrachud said.

But Additional Solicitor General Sanjay Jain sought a few hours to get instructions and in the afternoon told the court that the Army has accepted to give PC to all eligible women officers. The court then said officers who have disciplinary and vigilance clearance will be eligible for PC subject to their meeting other conditions.

Earlier, the bench had asked why PC was rejected to 72 women SSC officers. Of the 72, the Army said 39 were eligible for consideration since others did not fit the criteria. Yet, there was no forward movement, forcing the officers to approach the SC.

MAROONED CITY

Nearly 24 hours after rain stopped in Chennai, certain parts of the city, like Semmancheri above, were still marooned on Friday afternoon. While relief measures are being taken up in full swing, many areas have yet to receive any assistance. Emergency personnel have rescued 1,211 people and 96 animals from waterlogged areas in Chennai in five days, and the the Indian Coast Guard (ICG) has deployed five teams for augmenting flood relief operations | ASHWIN PRASATH | P7

Bommai chairs GST group, crucial meet next week

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@Bengaluru

CHIEF Minister Basavaraja Bommai on Friday chaired, through video conference, a preliminary meeting of the Group of Ministers (GoM) on rationalising GST.

It was the first such meeting after Bommai called on Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in October first week and discussed in detail about restructuring the slabs and rationalising the tax rates.

The preliminary meeting lasted over three hours. Finance ministers of member states of the GST Council and officials from finance departments of states and the Centre took part.

Bommai, who is the convenor of the Group of Ministers, is expected to convene a conclusive meeting next week as the group has to submit its recommendations to the GST Council within two months.

The deliberations were kept confidential, while sources said that no major decisions were taken.

Chief Minister Basavaraja Bommai at the virtual meeting with GoM on GST

The GST Council constituted the GoM on September 24, 2021 to restructure the tax system with Bommai as the chairman of a seven-member committee including the finance ministers from Goa, Kerala, Rajasthan, Bihar, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh.

The rate rationalisation includes correction of inverted duty structure and reduction of classification-related disputes to enhance GST revenues.

Recommendations by the Bommai-headed group will be crucial as they will bring widespread rationalisation in the tax structure.

Tape surfaces, currency disappears as charges swirl in Bitcoin scam

BALA CHAUHAN & CHETAN M G
@Bengaluru

EVEN as the Bitcoin scam is getting curiouser and curiouser, an audio clip of a telephonic conversation, purportedly between two policemen discussing the case involving hacker Srikrishna alias Sriki, is doing the rounds. While one is trying to seek information on those behind the case, the other one says biggies, at the ministers' level, are involved.

The person seeking information is purportedly a senior police officer, while the other sharing it is said to be a lower-rung staff, who is part of the investigation team probing the Bitcoin case.

The caller asks about the transactions, and the staff replies that bigwigs have been paid off using Bitcoins, but refuses to reveal the names, saying he is not completely sure. When the officer insists, the staff says it has happened at the ministers' level in 2018. The officer asks whether the Home Minister's name too has been mentioned, and the staff replies in the negative and says names of some IPS officers are there.

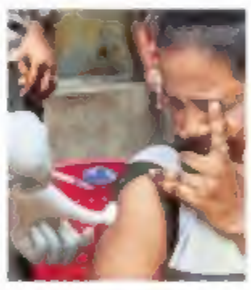
When the names of IPS officers are asked, the staff starts talking about some other development. The top officer is also assured by the staffer that his name is not involved in the scam.

Meanwhile, sources told TNIE that Sriki could be a key "asset" for further leads into the rampant cryptocurrency and hacking scams in the country that may have national and international ramifications.

"This case could be a tip of the iceberg in cryptocurrency and money laundering scams, which threaten the sovereignty of fiat currency," said sources. Being the first BTC scam case in Karnataka, many law enforcement agencies, including the Directorate of Enforcement (ED), are keen to crack it but have made no headway for reasons unknown.

"In fact, till date, the extent of the BTC fraud and the names of people behind it are not known," said informed sources.

CONTINUED ON: P4



NATIONWIDE	NOV 11	NOV 12
Fresh cases	13,091	12,516
Recoveries	13,878	13,155
Deaths	340	501
KARNATAKA	**NOV 11**	**NOV 12**
Fresh cases	286	227
Recoveries	289	206
Deaths	7	2

TAKE YOUR SHOT

November 11
48,76,535 doses

November 12
52,99,938 doses

TOTAL DOSES 111,35,03,584

None in govt involved: CM; SC judge must probe: Cong

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Bengaluru

CHIEF Minister Basavaraj Bommai on Friday said that none of the members of his government is involved in the Bitcoin scam and challenged opposition Congress to provide documentary evidence to agencies probing it.

"Let those making allegations provide evidence as to what the scam is all about and who all are involved. As our government is open to a probe by any investigative agency, the truth will come out," he said.

Earlier in the day, Congress leader and former information technology minister Priyank Kharge said demanded a probe by a sitting Supreme Court judge.

Citing a petition filed by the father of the accused Srikirshna alias Sriki in the court, Kharge said the accused was allegedly administered mind-altering drugs when he was in police custody.

REPORT: P6

Merck's Covid-19 pill close to regulator nod, may cost ₹500-₹1,000

SUMI SUKANYA DUTTA @ New Delhi

THE oral Covid-19 pill developed by US drug major Merck and Ridgeback Biotherapeutics could be launched in coming weeks in the India market, with the full treatment course estimated to cost ₹500-₹1,000.

The drug molnupriravir, a broad spectrum antiviral, has shown promise in international trials in halting the progression of Covid-19 in its early stages. Last week, the UK became the first country in the world to approve the drug, recommending its use right after a positive coronavirus test and within five days of the onset of symptoms. CONTINUED ON: P10

Anxious Doctors take booster shots

Bengaluru: Anxious on seeing breakthrough infections, ICU admissions, fatalities and waning antibodies among those immunised with both doses, healthcare workers and doctors in Karnataka are jumping the gun and silently taking booster shots. "Not just government, even private hospital doctors are doing this. We are educated and are following research that's out," said a doctor. P3

Fresh to home
This calls for a
Chicken Dinner.
Here's a deal as fine as our premium, tender Chicken. Do not miss it.
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GREEN SHOOTS

For pandemic-hit farmers, Krishi Mela turns into boon

Visitors admire a pair of bullocks that are on display along with other livestock, on the second day of Krishi Mela at the GKVK campus in Bengaluru on Friday

DONNA EVA @Bengaluru

THE impact of Covid-linked lockdowns on agriculture was on full display at Krishi Mela 2021 as farmers and hobbyists, thronging the venue at the University of Agricultural Sciences (UAS) GKVK campus in Hebbal, scouted for technologies to overcome farming challenges that have become harder because of the pandemic.

The constant drizzle and sludge-clogged paths failed to dissuade them as they poured in from all over the state to check new equipment, technologies and crop varieties at the exhibition — especially as last year's event had limited the number of visitors due to Covid restrictions and was mainly live-streamed. This year, it was open to all.

The more common problems that farmers in Karnataka seemed to face were water and labour shortage, and they were found looking for solutions here.

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